

[Father Says]

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FATHER SAYS

Granite City was gay in holiday mood. Spirals of red, green, yellow, blue, red lights colored the lamp posts and the band stand. Small Christmas tress blinked their electric bulbs with untiring rapidity. Snow-etched elm branches caught the colors, toned them to pastel shades and held them overhead. A woman in the blue caps and bonnet of the Salvation Army strode through the park, head bent against the snow, homeward bound after a weary evening of solliciting nickels and pennies from the passersby. Now the tambourine lay silent under her arm. Further down the street another of her brethren stood at his post beside a great iron pot. The man dug his chin into his coat collar for warmth. He stamped his feet; all the time he shook a bell and urged the pedestrians to "keep the pot a boilin' with silver."

Jean MacMasters' car faced the brilliantly lighted park. She sat there watching the city tire of its evening's celebration.

She said, "This is the first night the stores are keeping open for Christmas shopping. There'll be two weeks of it. We had an official opening tonight. A real celebration. All the kids in town were around to get bags of candy from Santa Claus. Leave it to our chamber of commerce! My father says 2 they can stir up more enthusiasm and public spirit in one evening than your capitol city could in six months' time. Tonight most of the smaller kids had their fathers and mothers or older sisters with them, and after the Santa Claus party they couldn't resist going into the stores to see the Christmas stock and, of course, to buy. We had a big fire about two weeks ago that completely wiped out the Fishman store. It's

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already temporarily established in a new location, and open for business tonight. That's a sample of our Barre speed.

"I work in the State House in Montpelier. I like the work but I'd much rather be in some office here in town. That's difficult—I mean finding an office job in Barre. There's not much other than office work in the sheds and quarries. After I graduated from high school I waited all summer for work in some local office. Fall came and I was still looking and waiting so I went to Boston and took a one year commercial course. Since then I've been in the State House. Four years now. I commute. Seven miles each way isn't too bad a drive, but I'd rather be working in town—

"I've lived here all my life. My grandfather was the first MacMasters in Barre. He came over here from Peterhead, Scotland, just before the turn of the century. He was a quarryman over there, he came over here to do the same kind of work. Father was about seven years old then. Father went into the quarries as soon as he was old enough to work. He learned everything he knows of the trade from his father. His people have been quarriers in Scotland for four or five generations. ³ But it looks like it's going to stop with my father. I have two brothers and neither of them shows the slightest interest in granite. It's just as well. Father says he wouldn't have them down there with him. He says it was all right for the old timers, but there's no future in it for a young fellow. I agree with him. I know the worrying my mother goes through with one in the family down in the quarries all kinds of weather. It's a nerve-racking job, being a quarryman's wife.

"Last year my oldest brother Mal went to Scotland with my mother. They stayed away five months. Mother was born in Scotland, and remembers it well. Better than father. Mal said that they were digging new quarries close to the property line of grandfather's old farm. It was good news for us. The farm belongs to us now, and I don't suppose any of us will ever go over there to make our home. So father's got in touch with a lawyer near Peterhead and he's trying to sell it to the quarry owners. Father says that when he was a child there wasn't a quarry within seven miles of the farm. Since then they've crept closer and closer.

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Now they're right in the backyard. Mal was all for hanging on to the farm a while longer, but father says it's best to sell now before they got too deep into the quarry. They may discover that the stone is inferior, then the farm would be worthless in the middle of all those excavations. On the other hand, if it happened to be an unusually good grade of stone, the old farm would be worth a fortune.

"Mal brought back pictures of the country near the farm. It looks to me like Graniteville. Not so hilly, but just as scrubby in appearance. Mal said he enjoyed traveling over and 4 back, but the four months on the farm was as lonesome a four months as ever he spent. They had no car with them. Most of the time they simply lay under the trees and read. He was glad to return to the States.

"Mal says in Scotland the granite men resent Barre and Barre granite. They think of those first ones who left Scotland for Barre as deserters, and look down upon them for having brought their knowlege of quarrying and tools to another country."

The streets were emptying of people. A young couple strolled through the park. Their pace was leisurely. Their heads were inclined towards each other in conversation.

Jean was talkative. "See that couple? They were married about a month ago. His father and her father are business partners. MacLean and Ryan. They own the quarry where my father works. My father always used to say they were ideal partners. Never argued. Never had a word about how the other was trying to run the business. They made money together, and enjoyed making it together. They vacationed together this summer in Maine for two weeks, and when they came back they told the workmen it was the best time they'd ever had. Then along the last of July the boss' son, Johnnie MacLean started paying attention to the other boss' daughter. Ella Ryan is her name. Old MacLean and Ryan beamed upon them. Ella walked into the office one day and showed her diamond ring to old MacLean. He joked about it, said his son Johnnie was certainly Scotch, she deserved a bigger diamond than that. He was pleased with the match, and made plans to renovate a

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small house he owns up the 5 Hill and give it to them as a wedding present. Ella began to discuss her plans for a Catholic marriage ceremony, and right away old MacLean put his foot down. Said his people had been of the same faith for centuries back, and no Johnnie-upstart was going to break the line now by having a ceremony performed by a Catholic priest.

“Ella told him she wasn't trying to convert Johnnie, she wanted only that they be married by the priest. Old MacLean wouldn't hear of it. Said he'd rather have no marriage at all. Young Johnnie didn't see things the way his father did. He and Ella went right ahead with their plans. They were married last month by the priest, in the rectory.

“Neither old MacLean nor his wife went to the wedding. And he didn't give them the little house, either. Johnnie had a good job in the quarry office. He had to give that up when he quarreled with his father. He must have had a little money saved, because he appears to be getting along all right even though he hasn't worked for a month.

“Father says old MacLean and Ryan won't stay in the same office any more. They pass each other without speaking. Each one is trying hard to sell out his share of the quarry. Father says it's telling on the workmen. They can't act natural with the bosses. If they happen to be laughing and chatting with MacLean, and Ryan appears on the scene they become tongue-tied and awkward. They shut up like clams. They like both bosses; they don't want to be partial to one or to the other.

“Other years the quarrymen'd get together at Christmas and give the two bosses a gift they could both use in the office. 6 They can't do that this year. There'll have to be two presents. Father says their both stubborn. He won't side with one or the other. He says that Ella and Johnnie were old enough to know what kind of a wedding ceremony they wanted. I feel the same way. It's their wedding, not old Maclean's and Ryan's—

“Old MacLean used to spend half of his evenings at the Ryan house. Ella's younger sister Mildred entered the convent in Burlington two years ago. Ryan was delighted with the idea

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of having a nun for a daughter. He was so genuinely pleased that Old MacLean couldn't help being proud along with him. He talked about it to all his friends, you'd almost think it was his own daughter. He even insisted upon sharing half the expense of the habits - or whatever you call those clothes they have to wear. And the day they took her to the convent he rode down with them in the Ryan car.

"Father says he's seen friendships like that broken up before. Two people who have been friends all their lives, and then when they're old and need friendship more than ever—they have to break up. Father says one's as stubborn as the other. He doesn't believe either one of them will ever make a move to become friends again.

"Ella and Johnnie are still on good terms with the Ryans. They visit there often. Father says that's why Old MacLean is so mad. He always thought the sun rose and set on his Johnnie. They were pals. He misses him. But he's just Scotch enough not to give in. Johnnie's mother must feel it as much as her husband. I wouldn't be surprised if she sees him once in a while secretly. But father says no, she'd stick to Old MacLean."

Jean yawned. "I suppose I ought to be getting home. I have to get up fairly early to make the State House at eight o'clock. Father says it's a laugh to call this his car. I use it every day driving to Montpelier, and evenings I have it; like tonight-